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Date : 2 August 1948

I certify that Document Number TC-72-75 was introduced into evidence as Exhibit Number GB-67 in the Trial by the International Military Tribunal of Hermann GOERING, et al, which commenced on 20 November 1945, and that the attached photostat is a true and correct copy of the original.

Fred Niebergall

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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Paul Joosten

PAUL A. JOOSTEN

General Secretary
International Military Tribunal

Nuremberg, 30 July 1948

[4.]

TC72

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL
NURNBERG, GERMANY
GB Exhibit 39
Filed

Miscellaneous No. 9 (1939)

DOCUMENTS

CONCERNING

GERMAN-POLISH RELATIONS

AND THE

OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of His Majesty

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On the other hand, His Majesty's Government, noting with interest the German Chancellor's reference in the message now under consideration to a limitation of armaments, believe that, if a peaceful settlement can be obtained, the assistance of the world could confidently be anticipated for practical measures to enable the transition from preparation for war to the normal activities of peaceful trade to be safely and smoothly effected.

8. A just settlement of these questions between Germany and Poland may open the way to world peace. Failure to reach it would ruin the hopes of better understanding between Germany and Great Britain, would bring the two countries into conflict, and might well plunge the whole world into war. Such an outcome would be a calamity without parallel in history.

GB-67

No. 75.

Sir N. Henderson to Viscount Halifax (received 2·35 A.M. August 29).

(Telegraphic.) *Berlin, August 28, 1939.*

I SAW the Chancellor at 10·30 this evening. He asked me to come at 10 P.M., but I sent word that I could not have the translation ready before the later hour. Herr von Ribbentrop was present, also Dr. Schmidt. Interview lasted one and a quarter hours.

2. Herr Hitler began by reading the German translation. When he had finished, I said that I wished to make certain observations from notes which I had made in the conversations with the Prime Minister and His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In the first place I wished to say that we in England regarded it as absurd that Britain should be supposed by the German Government to consider the crushing of Germany as a settled policy. We held it to be no less astonishing that anyone in Germany should doubt for a moment that we would not fight for Poland if her independence or vital interests were menaced.

3. Our word was our word, and we had never and would never break it. In the old days Germany's word had the same value, and I quoted a passage from a German book (which Herr Hitler had read) about Marshal Blücher's exhortation to his troops when hurrying to the support of Wellington at Waterloo: "Forward, my children, I have given my word to my brother Wellington, and you cannot wish me to break it."

4. Herr Hitler at once intervened to observe that things were different 125 years ago. I said not so far as England was concerned. He wanted, I said, Britain's friendship. What value would he place on our friendship if we began it by disloyalty to a friend? Whatever some people might say, the British people sincerely desired an understanding with Germany, and no one more so than the Prime Minister (Herr von Ribbentrop remarked that Mr. Chamberlain had once said

to him that it was his dearest wish). To-day the whole British public was behind the Prime Minister. The recent vote in the House of Commons was an unmistakable proof of that fact. The Prime Minister could carry through his policy of an understanding if, but only if, Herr Hitler were prepared to co-operate. There was absolutely no truth in the idea sometimes held in Germany that the British Cabinet was disunited or that the country was not unanimous. It was now or never, and it rested with Herr Hitler. If he was prepared to sacrifice that understanding in order to make war or immoderate demands on Poland, the responsibility was his. We offered friendship but only on the basis of a peaceful and freely negotiated solution of the Polish question.

5. Herr Hitler replied that he would be willing to negotiate, if there was a Polish Government which was prepared to be reasonable and which really controlled the country. He expatiated on misdoings of the Poles, referred to his generous offer of March last, said that it could not be repeated and asserted that nothing else than the return of Danzig and the whole of the Corridor would satisfy him, together with a rectification in Silesia, where 90 per cent. of the population had voted for Germany at the post-war plebiscite but where, as a result of Haller–Korfanti *coup*, what the Plebiscite Commission had allotted had nevertheless been grabbed by Poland.

6. I told Herr Hitler that he must choose between England and Poland. If he put forward immoderate demands there was no hope of a peaceful solution. Corridor was inhabited almost entirely by Poles. Herr Hitler interrupted me here by observing that this was only true because a million Germans had been driven out of that district since the war. I again said the choice lay with him. He had offered a Corridor over the Corridor in March, and I must honestly tell him that anything more than that, if that, would have no hope of acceptance. I begged him very earnestly to reflect before raising his price. He said his original offer had been contemptuously refused and he would not make it again. I observed that it had been made in the form of a dictate and therein lay the whole difference.

7. Herr Hitler continued to argue that Poland could never be reasonable: she had England and France behind her, and imagined that even if she were beaten she would later recover, thanks to their help, more than she might lose. He spoke of annihilating Poland. I said that reminded me of similar talk last year of annihilation of the Czechs. He retorted that we were incapable of inducing Poland to be reasonable. I said that it was just because we remembered the experience of Czecho-Slovakia last year that we hesitated to press Poland too far to-day. Nevertheless, we reserved to ourselves the right to form our own judgment as to what was or what was not reasonable so far as Poland or Germany were concerned. We kept our hands free in that respect.

8. Generally speaking, Herr Hitler kept harping on Poland, and I kept on just as consistently telling Herr Hitler that he had to choose between friendship with England which we offered him and

excessive demands on Poland which would put an end to all hope of British friendship. If we were to come to an understanding it would entail sacrifices on our part. If he was not prepared to make sacrifices on his part there was nothing to be done. Herr Hitler said that he had to satisfy the demands of his people, his army was ready and eager for battle, his people were united behind him, and he could not tolerate further ill-treatment of Germans in Poland, &c.

9. It is unnecessary to recall the details of a long and earnest conversation in the course of which the only occasion in which Herr Hitler became at all excited was when I observed that it was not a question of Danzig and the Corridor, but one of our determination to resist force by force. This evoked a tirade about the Rhineland, Austria and Sudeten and their peaceful reacquisition by Germany. He also resented my references to 15th March.

10. In the end I asked him two straight questions. Was he willing to negotiate direct with the Poles and was he ready to discuss the question of an exchange of populations? He replied in the affirmative as regards the latter (though I have no doubt that he was thinking at the same time of a rectification of frontiers). As regards the first, he said he could not give me an answer until after he had given reply of His Majesty's Government the careful consideration which such a document deserved. In this connexion he turned to Herr von Ribbentrop and said: "We must summon Field-Marshal Göring to discuss it with him."

11. I finally repeated to him very solemnly the main note of the whole conversation so far as I was concerned, namely, that it lay with him as to whether he preferred a unilateral solution which would mean war as regards Poland, or British friendship. If he were prepared to pay the price of the latter by a generous gesture as regards Poland, he could at a stroke change in his favour the whole of public opinion not only in England but in the world. I left no doubt in his mind as to what the alternative would be, nor did he dispute the point.

12. At the end Herr von Ribbentrop asked me whether I could guarantee that the Prime Minister could carry the country with him in a policy of friendship with Germany. I said there was no possible doubt whatever that he could and would, provided Germany co-operated with him. Herr Hitler asked whether England would be willing to accept an alliance with Germany. I said, speaking personally, I did not exclude such a possibility provided the developments of events justified it.

13. Conversation was conducted in quite a friendly atmosphere, in spite of absolute firmness on both sides. Herr Hitler's general attitude was that he could give me no real reply until he had carefully studied the answer of His Majesty's Government. He said that he would give me a written reply to-morrow, Tuesday. I told him that I would await it, but was quite prepared to wait. Herr Hitler's answer was that there was no time to wait.

14. I did not refer to the question of a truce. I shall raise that point to-morrow if his answer affords any real ground for hope that he is prepared to abandon war for the sake of British understanding.

No. 76.

Sir N. Henderson to Viscount Halifax (received 4·55 P.M.).

(Telegraphic.) *Berlin, August 29, 1939.*

FOLLOWING are additional points in amplification of my telegram of 28th August* :—

Herr Hitler insisted that he was not bluffing, and that people would make a great mistake if they believed that he was. I replied that I was fully aware of the fact and that we were not bluffing either. Herr Hitler stated that he fully realised that that was the case. In answer to a suggestion by him that Great Britain might offer something at once in the way of colonies as evidence of her good intentions, I retorted that concessions were easier of realisation in a good rather than a bad atmosphere.

* No. 75.

No. 77.

Speech by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on August 29, 1939.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Chamberlain): Since the House met on Thursday last there has been little change in the main features of the situation. The catastrophe, as I said then, is not yet on us, but I cannot say that the danger of it has yet in any way receded. In these circumstances it might perhaps have seemed that it was unnecessary to ask the House to meet again before the date which had been fixed, but in times like these we have felt that it was right that the House should be kept as far as possible continuously informed of all the developments in the situation as they took place. That will continue to be the principle which will guide us in further meetings of this House.

There is one thing that I would like to say at this moment with regard to the press. I think it is necessary once more to urge the press to exercise the utmost restraint at a time when it is quite possible for a few thoughtless words in a paper, perhaps not of particular importance, to wreck the whole of the efforts which are being made by the Government to obtain a satisfactory solution. I have heard that an account purporting to be a verbatim description of the communication of the British Government to Herr Hitler was

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